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THE TOP 10 POINTS FOR PRACTICE

Relax Your Head and Neck

Lighten up! Allow a light, natural, alive feeling in your head, jaw and neck. Enjoy what your senses are taking in, and don't think too much. When your neck and head are relaxed, your spirit can rise.

Relax Your Shoulders and Let Your Elbows Drop

Keep your shoulders relaxed and open. When you raise your shoulders, your qi follows your tense shoulders up, and you become top-heavy. When you relax your shoulders and let your elbows hang from them, your qi will sink downward. Then your movements can be driven by strong lower muscles.

Relax Your Chest

Relax your chest so your qi can sink to your dantian in your lower belly. If you expand your chest, the qi can get stuck there, and you will be top-heavy. Relaxing your chest also helps your heart to be free and easy.

Relax Your Belly and Hips

All movement comes from the waist and hips. Relaxation there allows your legs to be stable and powerful.

Separate Your Weight

Get comfortable with your body center fully on one leg while the other leg is empty. This is also called "distinguishing substantial and insubstantial." Feel how you are rooted in the earth through your foot. When you practice this principle, your movements will be lighter and more agile.

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STAND
like a mountain;
MOVE
like a mighty river.

Use Your Mind and Not Force

Relax your whole body, even your blood vessels, ligaments and bones, and don't use force. When you use force, you restrict the flow of energy through your sinews, bones, blood vessels and meridians of qi, and your freedom of movement is compromised. To have power without using force, relax the meridians in your body, which are like the rivers in the earth. When your meridians are open, your qi flows easily. When your meridians are blocked by using stiff force, your movements won't be agile or natural. By deeply relaxing your body and mind while you practice tai chi, your qi will flow freely in all parts of your body. After long practice, you will develop internal power. The tai chi classics say, "When you are extremely soft, you become extremely strong."



Yang Chengfu

These are my interpretations of the traditional ten basic principles of tai chi chuan according to Yang Chengfu, the greatest teacher of the Yang family style of tai chi in the 1920s and 1930s.

Coordinate Your Upper and Lower Body

Move your upper and lower body together. This principle is often called "keeping nose and navel in alignment." The tai chi classics say, "Your movements should be rooted in your feet, released through your legs, controlled by your waist and manifested through your fingers." You become one harmonious line of qi.

Harmonize Your Internal and External

Feel all the layers of your body, inside and outside, and feel them as a unity. The tai chi classics say, "The spirit is the commander and the body is subordinate." Open your physical body, and open your mind/spirit also. Relax on the outside while your heart and spirit are concentrated on the inside.

Move With Tranquility, Seek Stillness in Movement

T'ai chi uses stillness to control movement. Even as you move, there is also stillness. In practicing the form, slow and tranquil is better, so that you can breathe deeply and allow your qi to sink to your dantian. The tai chi classics advise you to "stand like a mountain."

Move Continuously

From beginning to end, the form is continuous and circular. The tai chi classics advise you to move "like pulling silk from a cocoon" and "like a great river rolling on unceasingly."